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PERSONAL CHANGE THROUGH SERMONS

Rev. Charles A. Curran, Ph.D.

RETREATS FOR NON-CATHOLIC CLERGYMEN

Jules Loh

REV. MICHAEL J. MURPHY
2227 ANSEL RD.
CLEVELAND 13, OHIO



IT SEEMS TO ME

A Liturgical Catechumenate

Parochial inquiry classes account for many of our converts and possess obvious advantages in a pluralist society like ours. But they could be immeasurably more effective if—as in the early catechumenate—instruction was accompanied by spiritual formation and increasing participation in the prayer of the Church. Formerly, the catechumen was sanctified and encouraged at separate stages in his spiritual journey by liturgical rites of initiation.

In addition to its other numerous accomplishments, the “Constitution on Sacred Liturgy” promulgated at the close of the second session of Vatican Council II, gives explicit authorization for the restoration of a truly liturgical catechumenate.

“The catechumenate for adults,” states article 64, “comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be taken into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time.”

Article 66 calls for the revision of both the simple and the more solemn rite for the baptism of adults in accordance with the restored catechumenate. And the same article makes provision for “A Special Mass ‘for the conferring of baptism’ to be inserted into the Roman Missal.”

Article 69 decrees that “A new rite is to be drawn up for converts who have already been validly baptized; it should indicate they are now admitted to communion with the Church.”

To understand the changes entailed in this Constitution, apostolic priests might well begin by reading a commentary on the earlier action of the Sacred Congregation of Rites entitled: “The Restored Liturgical Catechumanate” by Rev. Frederick R. McManus, *Worship*, August-September 1962. Undoubtedly, full commentaries on the Constitution itself will appear in due time.

JOHN T. MCGINN, C.S.P.

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Personal Change Through Sermons

Rev. Charles A. Curran, Ph.D.

We might fittingly begin our discussion of the effects of a sermon on the hearers by an old familiar axiom, "whatever is received, is received according to the manner of the one receiving." The implications of this axiom could be analyzed in an almost infinite variety of ways. We might, for example, think about it in terms of food. While you must have a good piece of steak or some similar basic foodstuff, much of the effectiveness of the meal is yet determined by the skill of the cooking and serving. This involves the complicated process of adapting the meal to each person. The absence or presence of even small details can sometimes destroy the pleasure and impede the assimilation of what was basically good food. Too much salt, pepper or garlic or not enough can spoil for even a whole group, an otherwise excellent meal. It is not only the food itself that is important, therefore, but also the uniquely personal reactions of each participant in the meal.

Good preaching has much in common with the preparation and serving of a fine dinner. As we have to have proteins, carbohydrates or whatever one would call a basic staple diet, so we also have to have sound theological and philosophical doctrine to give a nourishing base to the literary, intellectual and spiritual meal we are presenting. But this is not enough. In fact, it may be sadly inadequate, much as an excellent piece of steak poorly cooked or salted too much can be a disappointment to everyone. The learned theologian or scholar by the absence of other necessary qualities in his presentation, can fail to produce an effective response in his hearers. Though he may be profound in his thoughts and intellectually alert to all the influential movements of his time, he may not adapt his

material to suit all the subtle elements that go into absorption and assimilation in the audience itself.

It is this second phase of preaching—audience reaction—that, I take it, is our focus for the afternoon. We are therefore considering not so much the "whatever is received" which might be the fundamental, theological and philosophical soundness of our presentation but rather the human psychology of "the manner of the one receiving." Excellent material will yet ultimately be determined in its effectiveness on its hearers by the way this material is received. It will not be assimilated if it is presented in such a manner that it tends to create either indifference, resistance or some other strong negative reaction in some or all of the receivers.

We do not mean to imply that there is no value in intellectual exposition alone or that other kinds of sermons and instructions are not equally valid and necessary. There is certainly an extremely wide range of sermon material, traditions and methods beyond the scope of our consideration here. But, if we consider "audience reaction" as implying moving the hearer to some kind of personal involvement and action, then more than a cold, impersonal, intellectual presentation would seem to be necessary.

What clues can we use to give us an entrée into the audience's inner-personal world so that we may make our presentation effective and palatable? There are some special complexities here. It is difficult to tell people what to do in such a

Presented at the Third Annual Meeting of The Catholic Homiletic Society, Chicago, 1960, entitled The Psychology of Audience Reaction: Personal Change Through Sermons. Copyright 1960 by C. A. Curran, Ph.D. Reprinted with the author's permission.

way that they can readily do it. As Shakespeare so well knew, "if to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches and poor men's cottages princes' palaces." There is a vast difference between telling a person "what were good to do" and the process that brings about the internal, psychosomatic coordination and integration necessary to do this.

Through psychological research in counseling and psychotherapy, we have learned that people are most helped to make personal changes in conduct when they are aided to take counsel with themselves and interrelate the information they are receiving with their own inner world of personalized singularity. This would also seem to apply to the effects of a sermon. Each hearer has his own world of personal uniqueness. We could perhaps demonstrate this interrelationship by a triangle. One can conceive of the base of the triangle as symbolizing the general theological or philosophical knowledge that needs to be presented. These truths are the common need of the whole human race in that they contain the basic tradition of Christian faith and understanding. This constitutes the universal base. The point of the triangle symbolizes each one's uniqueness. Applied for the moment to our own situation here, the information going out from this platform will end in the unique world of each of you. This unique world is not only your intellectual understanding but includes also those subtle qualities which involve your emotions, instincts, soma, and the integration of these with your reason and will. In an Aristotelian sense that man is a rational animal, it is your animality interrelated and controlled by your rationality that will finally make operationally effective anything you hear here.

We have often heard the expression about winning an argument and losing a friend. Here we have an awareness that one can be logically consistent without being truly effective. One can be convincing in the sense that one can conquer another person intellectually and thus silence him. Yet one has not really persuaded him. Persuasion fails if a person is not motivated to carry out in his own unique world of experience and action the information presented to him.

In a passage of capital importance for a

psychology of preaching St. Thomas illuminates a well-known text from St. Paul with his usual profundity. It is the familiar text in which St. Paul is describing the quality of charity. He says, among other things, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, . . . it profiteth me nothing." St. Paul then describes with a delicately fine discrimination, the qualities of charity:

Charity is patient, is kind: Charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up; is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil: Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Christlike Love

St. Thomas poses the question, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels—why would it profit nothing?" He answers, first, that "To speak with the tongues of men and of angels," is to be a most outstanding intellectual. In other words, we must conceive here of an intellect as brilliant as is humanly possible or of an exposition that only an angel could give. But, according to St. Thomas, if I have all this knowledge, understanding and skill in exposition but lack these Pauline qualities of charity, my presentation will come to nothing because no one would be effectively changed. Unless a presentation is permeated with a sense of Christlike love, of human belonging and sharing it will not move a person's will. More than cold analysis is needed. An intellectual appeal without some of the warm qualities of sharing and belonging that St. Paul describes as the characteristics of supernatural charity, would seem therefore insufficient if one wishes to capture the personal commitment of the hearer.

How then, in relation to our audience, can we hope to arrive at this quality of charity as St. Paul and St. Thomas describe it? How do we move from the cold skeleton of a solid intellectual and theological structure—necessary as it is—to the warm flesh and blood of charity? We must go beyond the intellect to the will as it reasonably directs the emotions, instincts

and soma. Only this will produce that growth in the cardinal virtues so necessary to the integrated order of operation and so basic to the formation of Christian character.

In the counseling and psychotherapy relationship where we attempt to achieve basic changes in self-understanding and action, we find the word "sympathy" to be important in describing the quality of this relationship. "Sympathy" to be understood in this psychological sense, must first be coupled with another word with the same root, "empathy." "Empathy" is often illustrated by the picture of an athlete pole-vaulting. As he is trying to get his leg over the bar, invariably four or five people standing down below have their legs up helping him to get over. Somehow there is in the human condition a deep imitative sense of sharing. This seems somewhat instinctive and is apparently often unconscious. People are sometimes astonished when they see a picture and realize that their legs were up in the air. But when we see another man struggling, even if it is in so simple a thing as trying to put his leg over a bar, we apparently are affected at the deepest levels of our own primitive urge to participate and help.

The word "sympathy" in contrast to "empathy" suggests a higher, more human and more directly conscious and rational sharing. "Sympathy" in this sense is not simply a kind of sharing in sorrow. We mean rather its Greek sense of a "feeling with" others. It suggests peoples' conscious sharing of the human condition together. Counseling and psychotherapy seem most effective when the counselor has this "feeling with" others, this warm quality of commitment and belonging.

A purely intellectual presentation, however logical, sound and well structured, runs the danger of seeming to be impersonal and removed. None of us are attracted to love a skeleton. A skeleton always remains a foreboding figure. While it is a part of our humanity and we all know that we have a skeleton exactly like the one we see, yet it appears inhuman. It has none of the warmth of the human members that go around it and turn it into a man. "Sympathy" is the giving of this warm, human quality.

In a purely intellectual presentation espe-

cially of a somewhat abstract sort, there can be implied too a kind of condescending superiority, or at least, a tone that seems to remove the speaker from others. This "I" passing judgment on "you," may be convincing in the intellectual sense, but it seems often to run the risk of leaving the other person "cold," as he may say. People are thus unable to assimilate and absorb what is said. "I" and "you" can be too far apart, too uncommitted, too removed. If "I" is a voice coming down from the Olympian heights then, of course, there is no humanity in that voice. By contrast, we have St. Paul's magnificent conception that it was not that we first loved God but that God first loved us and in order to communicate this love He took upon Himself the body of a man and became like unto us in all things save sin. This is what we mean by "sympathy." We mean this capacity to become like our audience, to be one of them, to share the innermost sense of their human condition.

Shared Experience

When the weaknesses and strengths of the human condition are all shared together in the common voice of the speaker, there is no sense of removal or separation. No one is standing above another. The speaker is not heard as a sort of impartial observer who stands outside life and comments on it. This kind of observer usually does not win our attachment or move us to act on what he says. We are moved to act by a warm voice that is like us. It is, indeed, coming from outside us but it yet belongs to us in what we know we are and what we hope to be.

Let us look now at some of the things Our Lord said and did to see if we can get clues about the manner in which He carried out this process of being like man in all things save sin. How did He convey this deep sense of sharing the human condition? Let me pick two examples. The first reveals Our Lord's delicate understanding and sharing in human love and forgiveness. We recall the unforgettable scene where Mary Magdalene falls at the feet of Our Lord. He said nothing. He knew so well the value of silence. He knew the things Mary Magdalene was saying to herself. So He let her act out all these

deep emotions of sorrow and repentance as she washed His feet with her tears. He let her use her precious ointment to anoint Him. He only spoke, you remember, when someone raised an objection. He only spoke to defend her: "because she has loved much, much is forgiven her." Our Lord here gave us a classic statement of human "sympathy." A sympathy which goes down to one of the deepest and most intimate levels of feminine psychology: the boundless capacity of a woman's love.

We can now consider an example of Our Lord's actual preaching. If one were to ask what was the most appealing sermon ever preached most people perhaps might refer to the sermon of "The Prodigal Son." Even for its literary quality alone, it has been called the most perfect short-story ever written. Almost the whole world knows at least this one sermon of Christ.

The sermon begins with a common, deeply shared human experience: the conflicting feelings of a father who loves his son and yet who wants his son to be free. Intrinsically bound up with the father's love is his deep sense of a young man's right and need to be free. This is the first thing that catches us, the psychological conflict of a loving father who nonetheless does not want to dominate or control his son. So when the son insists on his freedom, in loving kindness the father sadly agrees. The son is given his share of his inheritance, not only because the father loves him but because the father also knows that love is free, that it cannot be forced. The son must be allowed to be free. In just a few sentences, the whole basic condition of the human race—its freedom, its need to love and the interrelation of freedom and love—is revealed.

The second deep human experience our Lord touches in this masterly parable is that of loneliness. This comes after one has spent all one's goods and wasted oneself. Here we relive in ourselves this feeling. We feel that same sense of having wasted something and wasted it terribly. We too wanted to be free and on our own to do what we pleased. But we too came finally at some turn in the road, to discover that we had been wrong, and perhaps even horribly foolish, and we are now caught in our own guilt and regrets. There is now only a sense of loss, of guilt.

We are growing increasingly to understand in counseling and psychotherapy, the way guilt digs into a person's soul, often making him tragically, miserably unhappy. But all of us know guilt and we all know this same sense of having wasted something selfishly. So here too we are caught up in this shared feeling and we wander with this boy. We can walk with him because we know how he feels.

We also can understand his fears about returning home. From a logical point of view he has no right to go home because, in a way, he deserves only his father's rejection and hostility. He has no right to anything but to hear, "I told you so. You were determined to make a fool of yourself and that is the end of it. I will have nothing more to do with you." From a certain point of view we can see that this could be. The other son has the right to everything. He was loyal and faithful. So we share the fear and anxiety of the guilty one. We know this anxiety; we know it even some nights when we wake up in the middle of the night and these anxieties strike us; when our own guilts and fears come forward.

Universal Feelings

So we know this young man in his innermost feelings. We know what it means to be alone, to feel guilty; anxious, distraught and fearful; even what it means to have no one. Now that he has spent his wealth all the shallow, superficial, good-time friends of the past are gone. He is alone, alone with his misery, his sorrow, but most of all alone with his fear.

We all know, finally, the last profound human qualities that are touched in the parable: love and forgiveness. One of the most difficult problems for every sinner is not only his sin or his guilt—it is the problem of forgiving himself and being willing to return to Christ. The subtle difference between Judas and Peter seems to bear this out. Peter, in a sense, was more cowardly than Judas and Peter's betrayal was in some ways as grave as that of Judas. Judas at least did something that had an element of manliness in it. He openly betrayed Christ. He betrayed Him for money, which money he later had the courage to throw back. But Peter, who boasted of his

courage, became a cowardly figure in a courtyard afraid of a servant girl. Peter's sin because of this very display of unmanly weakness would have been perhaps the more difficult one for him to forgive himself.

Yet the core of the comparison of these two pivotal characters, as we see them in the Gospel, is not only their sin but what they did with their guilt. Peter was somehow able first to forgive himself for the cheap and shabby cowardice that he had displayed before a little servant girl. He was then able to come back and face Christ again. He looked in Christ's eyes and in that look he received forgiveness. The tragedy of Judas was apparently that he was so guilty he could do nothing but attack himself. He could act out his changed view in a very dramatic way. He could throw those coins at the feet of the men who had aided the betrayal of Christ and disavow what he had done. But he could not return and face Our Lord. On the contrary, in self-hatred, apparently, he hanged himself. Here we are reminded of St. Thomas' illuminating observation that the sinner does not truly love himself but in fact, in his sin, hates and does evil to himself. In counseling and psychotherapeutic interviews, one sees many people in a similar psychological struggle not only because of the sin they committed but because they cannot forgive themselves. In pride and self-attack it is extremely difficult for them to turn and face the forgiving eyes of Christ.

This is the struggle of this young man in Our Lord's sermon before he can start back home. We can imagine him violently attacking himself for his stupidity, his pride, his vanity, his selfishness, his inconsideration—like a person who attacks himself in a counseling interview. All these things the young man can say about himself because he knows himself better than anyone else and he is the best observer of everything he does. So there he is, standing in severe judgment of himself. The struggle, as he turns to walk the long, long way home, is: can he forgive himself? Can he, who deserves only rejection, take a chance at throwing himself on his father's mercy? He finally resolves this agonizing dilemma by a very simple solution. People in violent psychological states of guilt and anxiety often seek such simple solutions.

The simple solution for this young man was that his father would hire servants and did from time to time. Many times he had seen men wander in, profligates of various sorts, and his father had been kind to them, had clothed them and fed them. So he said to himself, "I am no different now than any of those weak or drunken, disordered, inadequate men that I have seen come and go in my childhood. I will present myself that way at the servants' door and I will beg to be taken in just as they did." It is in this human condition of complete degradation, of having "hit bottom" as the Alcoholics Anonymous describes it, that he is able to think of forgiving himself. He finds one condition not lower than his own and this one condition is his pathway back.

Twice Blessed

All this time, you recall, the father had been going night after night up a hill to watch for him in loving concern and anxiety. The father from afar thus sees him coming and is overcome by joy. You all know and share the human condition of being forgiven and of coming home. This is the final sensitively delicate touch in Our Lord's parable. By contrast to the anxiety and the fear of being unwilling to forgive ourselves for a horrible act against someone who loves us and whom we love, there is—when one is able to forgive oneself enough at least just to return—the indescribably overwhelming relief of love and forgiveness. All of us know this and have in some way experienced it. We know that mercy, as Shakespeare says, "is twice blessed," that it blesses him who gives and him who receives. So the father in mercy and love is blessed and the son in receiving mercy and love is blessed. The conclusion of Our Lord's sermon: through this beautiful father-image we can begin to understand something of the profundity of Divine Love.

But how do we apply this concept of sharing the human condition of our hearers so profoundly illustrated in "The Prodigal Son" to our own sermons. Fundamentally we want to arrive at the hearer's own identification and involvement with what he hears. This is the way we feel as Our Lord is giving his sermon. We are, as the French say, "engagé"—that is, committed and intensely sharing.

In sharing the human condition then, we do not mean any extremely emotional or revivalist quality—this would be something else and could have quite a different purpose. What we mean—and what we find effective in counseling and psychotherapy—could be somewhat described by words like “warmth,” “commitment” or “belonging.” We rather suggest to our sermon audience some deeply human theme and allow each one’s own introspection to develop his uniquely personal variations and details. The analogy of a symphonic theme with its many different variations for each instrument, might be helpful here. Once this personal identification and involvement has been achieved in each hearer, the speaker can enlarge on the theological points implied. These will then have personal meaning and application for each hearer. They will not remain simply impersonal and be only general information. Having assimilated and made personal the basic theme, each hearer is now—like the hearers of Our Lord’s sermon—taking counsel with himself and his own human condition.

As we see, this warmth and sense of sharing is communicated primarily in the material of the sermon. The speaker’s manner will vary with the accustomed style and personality of each speaker. This kind of material however, would, it seems, tend to favor a somewhat calm and conversational tone. The speaker depends on the speaking system to carry his words into the ear of each hearer. The speaker avoids those mannerisms that would perhaps take the hearer away from his own self-involved pondering on what the speaker is saying. For the purpose we have in mind, the hearer is rather talking to himself, counseling himself even, through the voice of the speaker. The speaker therefore strives rather to lead and direct this deep personal meditation more than to attract attention to himself. His appeal, in so far as it is emotional, has a more suppressed and therefore intense quality in comparison with a more directly dramatic expression. It is more like the warm tone of deep sharing and understanding in the voice of a sensitive counselor.

Applying all this to our own audience now and our own sermons, let us look again at this idea of wandering away from home, of loneliness, of being lost, so poignantly

suggested in “The Prodigal Son.” Most little children have been lost. I was lost one time when I was three or four. It was my own fault, too. I wandered off in disobedience and was terribly lost, and I had that same fear of going back home. I expected to be rather badly spanked because I knew I had deliberately disobeyed. This ought to touch something in you, too. You must have been lost sometime. You must have been terribly afraid when you were lost. Now if so, we have touched on a common sharing of our uniqueness. You know what it is to be afraid to go home and so do I. This would again be the kind of common human touch that is in “The Prodigal Son.”

Coming Home

I can think of adults who have felt lost and alone. I recall one time being terribly lonely in a foreign country and I suspect this too will touch you somewhere. You too must know the loneliness of being in a strange land, or a strange city. This feeling is particularly poignant if people are speaking a foreign tongue. This adds to the ostracized feeling. This kind of loneliness can be really devastating sometimes. There is a real truth in the fact of being homesick. It is a terrible sickness. It is like being seasick. You cannot believe after it is over that you were as sick as you were. But literally one can almost want to die of homesickness just as one can nearly want to die of seasickness even though both may pass in a comparatively short time and, in a sense, there is nothing physically wrong with us in either sickness. Yet loneliness can be a terrible suffering. Well, I should have touched on something here that you can share. All of us at one time or another must have known some kind of homesickness or loneliness. If so we know how the prodigal son felt. We know, too, how he longed to be back home. We know how strange he felt in a foreign land or unknown city and how little he belonged there, how little any of it was part of himself. This we can all share.

We share deeply, too, the sense of coming home. Perhaps even the great appeal of Christmas to the world at this time each year owes something to this strong human feeling of wanting to be home. Not even

the Russians with all their skill in Pavlovian conditioning will perhaps be able to condition out of the human heart this Christmas sense of coming home, of returning to God. There is something about the light and warmth around the holy crib shining in the darkness that tells us we are nearing home—nearing the place where we will always belong. It is not unlike the prodigal son's beginning to see lights in the familiar houses of his own village. He knows he is near his father and his family and all those who love him. He belongs again. Christmas somehow seems to lead us all back to some similar kind of belonging, to a sense of coming home to God. If not no other time, at least at Christmas the world seems permeated with this tone and mood of a return to the God Who loves and forgives us.

All of us then, like the prodigal son, have wandered off, and all of us have returned home and experienced great joy and peace in being there. We know, too, what it means to come home and be forgiven for something. Few human experiences are as intense as to have carried round anxiety and guilt for a long, long time and then to discover that it was nothing, that all we had to do was to return home and face the issue and it all disappeared. To the relief of forgiveness is added the indescribable joy of an atmosphere that is suffused with mercy, kindness and understanding; all those tones that St. Paul lists as the qualities of charity.

This discussion of the prodigal son and its implications for ourselves should, at some point, have gone beyond what I said. It should have enabled you to begin to think of your own lives in varying ways and to tie up in the uniqueness of your own experience the meaning of what I have said. The psychology of the sermon of "The Prodigal Son," if one might use that term, is to lead us from the human love of a father which we can feel and understand and share, to the plenitude of Divine Love infinitely beyond us. As St. John tells us, how can we love God whom we see not if we love not our neighbor whom we see. Now if we cannot share love in the human condition, we will never understand it in the Divine condition. Our Lord, Who took upon Himself all the things of our human nature save sin, gives us therefore this striking parallel of

human love at its deepest and most delicate so we could use this as a scaffolding or ladder to God. Through it we can, in a sense, catapult ourselves to some understanding of the mystery of Divine Love. Aristotle in describing God says, "God is what man is at his very best and that infinitely more." This is exactly what Our Lord told us so well: when we understand a forgiving and loving father, we understand something of God's love and forgiveness, but that, infinitely more.

An English essayist has said:

Primitive and essential things have great power to touch the heart of the beholder. I mean such things as a man ploughing a field, or sowing or reaping; a girl filling a pitcher from a spring; a young mother with her child; a fisherman mending his nets; a light from a lonely hut on a dark night . . .

Scriptural Models

As we have seen, the New Testament gives us many illustrations of this. The above quotation has certainly this in mind. In the Old Testament, the Psalms which we meet each day in the Breviary, are filled with this same kind of sermon material. Think of the delicate meaning in God's love covering us like a bird covers a nest with its wings or like the "pupillum oculi." Deep basic protective mechanisms in animals and man are implied here that could be unfolded with both empathy and sympathy. We would, for example, quickly go blind, if we did not have this autonomic reflex to protect our eyes. Or again, the miserable frustration and helplessness that is suggested in the sinner being lost in a mire—and the sudden surge of hope and confidence when we can stand solidly or spring forward on the rock that is God. All of us have been "stuck in the mud" literally and spiritually and we know this frustrating feeling very well, indeed. We know, too, the freeing joy of Grace.

If we could think of one model that we would all like to resemble particularly in giving sermons, it would be that of Solomon. In the light of this, it is interesting to take a look again at the Book of Kings and notice what it was that Solomon prayed for.

You recall that he had a dream and in that dream God asked him what he wished. He did not, contrary to what popularly might be thought, pray for great wisdom. What he prayed for was an "understanding heart." God was so pleased at his prayer, however, that He gave him not only an "understanding heart" but all the great expanse of knowledge that is now known as the wisdom of Solomon. But Solomon prayed only for deep, human understanding.

What do we mean by an "understanding heart"? The people know. They know and convey the meaning of this in a somewhat strange use of the word "understanding." They will say of you, in great praise, that you are a very "understanding" man. Now what do they mean? They certainly do not mean that you understand English or some foreign language in which they may be speaking. This is to say, they are not trying to communicate anything that has to do with linguistics or even logic. They do not mean that you understood the grammatical constructions of their sentences. This is presumed. What they mean by you being a very understanding man is apparently what Solomon prayed for.

Alternately a person may say of someone, "He didn't understand me at all. He is a brilliant man and he gives wonderful, intellectual sermons but he just doesn't seem to understand. He certainly doesn't understand me." Here again we have, in a negative form, this peculiar twist to the meaning of the word "understanding." Here it means, "He does not share my human condition." The person might go on to say, "He hasn't any heart, he's all mind. He's brilliant but he doesn't feel the way you

feel. He doesn't understand what it means to be in the condition that I'm in." He might even say, "He hasn't any sympathy for my weakness. He just doesn't seem to understand."

In psychological research, it is becoming increasingly evident that unless one communicates some kind of "understanding heart," one does not seem effective in helping people change. It seems to me that this must also be true of any kind of preaching, teaching or exposition. No matter how brilliant our presentation, unless our communication is suffused with something of the quality of Pauline charity, it does not seem to convey to another this sense of a deeply "understanding heart." But if we can take as a model this master sermon, "The Prodigal Son," we can begin our own sermons with a sharing of the human condition of our hearers. We will attempt to reach down inside our hearers, so to speak, and try to tap in them some human quality of love, joy, gladness, sorrow, weakness—some element which we share together. From that core element, we try to bring out, as our Lord does so perfectly in "The Prodigal Son," the theological structure we wish to teach. But we anchor it deeply in their hearts and in our own, rather than keeping it coldly or impersonally intellectual. In other words we suffuse our sermons with that charity which St. Paul so well describes. If we do this—in addition to the indispensable qualities of theological knowledge and depth which our sermons must have—we will convey something of the profound wisdom of Solomon's prayer. The people then really can feel—"Here is a man with an 'understanding heart.'"

ACTIVATED UNITY

"Catholics believe, and irreformably so, that the Church of Christ is already one and possesses the basic unity which he himself has bestowed upon his people. Yet this unity must be constantly activated so as to engage each member of God's people in the fullness of the gifts he has bestowed upon them. Unity is not only a gift but also a task, a task for whose accomplishment Christ has sent his Holy Spirit."

Paul Broadhurst

Retreats for Non-Catholic Clergymen

Jules Loh

In the wooded quiet of a southern Mary-land retreat house one morning not long ago, a noted Jesuit priest was celebrating Mass. Except that the altar was reversed, so that the priest faced the congregation, there was little to suggest the event was anything extraordinary. Certainly, few would have ventured to suspect that the retreatants following the Mass attentively in the pews out front, all were Protestant ministers.

The "Retreat for Christian Clergymen," as its schedule pamphlet was titled, was the third such endeavor in little over a year.

To those who have participated in them, as well as to those who have watched from the wings, the retreats represent one of the boldest experiments to date in the ever expanding Catholic-Protestant dialogue. Their success can be gauged by the determination of one of the retreat groups to hold similar exercises, if only smaller-scale "days of recollection," as often as four times a year.

"There was no one involved in the retreat," remarked a Presbyterian minister who attended one, "who did not believe that God's grace was at work and that whatever hopes any of us had placed in it had been realized far beyond our most sanguine expectations."

The person who conceived the idea for the retreats was Rev. Thomas F. Middendorf, laymen's retreat director for the diocese of Covington, Ky. It came about as a natural, if daring, extension of earlier ecumenical efforts. Five years ago, Father Middendorf conducted a retreat for non-Catholic laymen which immediately became a diocesan fixture and now attracts 30 to 40 each year. He also holds an annual retreat for non-Catholic women.

"The whole idea is to let them know

the teachings of the Catholic Church in an unhurried way—away from the distractions of the world," Father Middendorf explained. "We never have even mentioned that they become Catholics, though a number of conversions have resulted. Our main purpose still is simply to correct the misconceptions many in the South have about the Church."

The retreats were so successful that Father Middendorf pondered the notion of holding one for non-Catholic clergymen.

Bishop John J. Wright of Pittsburgh, episcopal advisor to the Retreat Movement in the United States, approved of the idea and suggested it be sponsored by the National Catholic Laymen's Retreat Conference, of which Father Middendorf is executive secretary. The bishop also agreed to conduct the retreat himself.

"I sent out some feelers around Covington," said Father Middendorf, "and discovered many of the local ministers wanted to come but were, naturally, worried there might be some raised eyebrows among their own parishioners."

His solution was to write to all the bishops in the country, telling them of his idea, soliciting their prayers for its success ("in light of the ecumenical council"), and asking for their suggestions of ministers who might want to attend.

The result was a list of 2,000 ministers, of whom 37 from eight states accepted—with a promise there would be no personal publicity, no names, no pictures.

"Some were skeptical when they arrived," Father Middendorf said. "But the bishop was an eloquent retreat master and the spirit of charity prevailed on the part of everyone. When the ministers left, I think

Courtesy of *Columbia*, issue of Nov., 1962.

their general impression was that it was a very wholesome experience."

Watching from several hundred miles away, in Albany, N.Y., were two ecumenical minded clergymen and fast friends—Rev. Philip B. Carroll, S.J., director of the nearby Glenmont Retreat House, and Rev. Dr. Carlyle Adams, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Albany.

Dr. Adams describes himself as "a very positive Protestant," but one whose friendship with Catholics dates back to his boyhood when a Xaverian Brother was his Boy Scout leader. "I have always preached the reasons why I am a Protestant," he said, "not the reasons why I am not a Catholic."

Dr. Adams and Father Carroll began preparations. By May, eight months after the Covington retreat, they were ready to try one of their own at Glenmont.

Spiritual Exercises

They invited Rev. Gustave A. Weigel, S.J., to conduct the retreat. Father Weigel, professor of ecclesiology at Woodstock College, Md., is a consultant to the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and a man whose efforts and writings to further interfaith understanding are well known. In fact, he recently was awarded a doctor's degree by the Yale University Divinity School. "Father Weigel knows Protestant theology better than any man I know," said Presbyterian Dr. Adams.

Dr. Adams said he issued invitations carefully, selecting a cross section of representative Protestant ministers whom he knew to have an interest in scholarship and some experience in Catholic-Protestant relations. Also, for the most part, he chose younger men who would have many years ahead of them to cultivate any seeds of understanding that might be sown during their three-day experience.

The two dozen men who attended were Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, members of the Reformed Church in America, of the American Baptist Convention, the United Church of Christ, and of the Greek and Syrian Orthodox Churches. The Orthodox representatives accepted on the condition there would be no doctrinal or theological debates—though nothing of that sort had ever been contemplated, Dr. Adams said.

All the clergymen who took part, he said, felt the best way toward interfaith understanding "was not through a watering down of our differences, but by discussing them frankly. Nobody who took part was trying to convert anybody to anything."

Father Weigel based the retreat meditations, as had Bishop Wright earlier, on the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. Commented Dr. Adams, who observed his colleagues scribbling copious notes: "The meditations no doubt provided much material for sermons which will be preached in Protestant and Orthodox pulpits."

Each evening the clergymen assembled in the chapel and a Protestant minister led them in prayer, using selections from the writings of St. Augustine, St. Thomas More, St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Clement of Rome.

At their meals they listened to recordings of chapters from Father Weigel's works on ecumenism, and one afternoon the Jesuit theologian answered the ministers' written questions at an informal session on the lawn. At morning Mass, a Protestant minister read aloud the English translations of the Latin prayers.

Profound Change

Dr. Adams said the attitude of the ministers appeared to change overnight between the first and second days of the retreat. The first morning, he said, most attended Mass in an attitude of respectful observers. The second day, however, all "seemed to be following Father Weigel's suggestion that this be regarded as common worship."

The overall experience, said Dr. Adams, convinced the ministers "that they were witnesses to a new work of the Holy Spirit in human history."

Meanwhile, Father Middendorf was completing preparations for the third retreat—the second under the auspices of the National Catholic Laymen's Retreat Conference. It was held at the Jesuits' Loyola Retreat House at Faulkner, Md., and once again Father Weigel was the retreat master. More than 60 ministers attended, six of them veterans of the Covington experiment.

By now the first faltering steps had been taken; the format was becoming more polished, the goals somewhat clearer.

Rev. James A. Martin, S.J., director of Loyola Retreat House, said a specific aim of the retreat was "to present a view of modern Catholicism to fellow Christian Clergymen, some of whom may never have had personal contact with priest or Mass." But prime purpose, Father Martin said, remained precisely the same as all retreats: to enable men to go apart in order to be closer to God."

"Man has a natural resentment and fear of those things which he doesn't understand," said one minister. "A retreat of this woe will provide the open minded Protestant with a logical explanation of those things concerning Catholicism which he has not for centuries have been withheld intentionally from him."

Said another:

"I have long sensed the value of silence;

now I have experienced it and found it to be beneficial beyond my imagination. I depart reluctantly, and hope to come again."

The anonymous minister no doubt will have an opportunity to come again. Though the watchword from Bishop Wright to those promoting the retreats is "proceed with caution," the endeavor has all the earmarks of a new movement aborning and the National Catholic Laymen's Retreat Conference, for its part, already refers to the clergymen's retreat as an "annual" event.

Whatever its future, the significance of its brief past is obvious.

When Protestant ministers and Catholic priests silently answer together the summons of the same chapel bell, the yearnings of both for one flock and one shepherd doesn't seem such a remote possibility after all.

SANCTITY IN AMERICA

"[Is it possible] that in this our modern world, so profane and so tainted by unbelief and vice, that a national sanctity should have been produced and precisely in America? . . . This is our trust and our hope. When we see certain manifestations of American Catholic life, the parishes, the schools, the universities, the hospitals, the missions, when we observe the spirit of faith and sacrifice underlying these works, when we feel the profound and solid union linking those Catholics to the Catholic Church, when we have before us priests and religious who reflect the example of John Neumann, how great a trust, how great a hope fills our soul?" Pope Paul VI, at the beatification of John Neumann, fourth Bishop of Philadelphia, first U.S. male citizen to be declared blessed.



CATECHETICAL MATERIALS

In spite of what Gilbert K. Chesterton and Bishop Sheen have said about finding a 'thrill in monotony,' we instructors are still terribly human and frail. We, like everyone else, look for an occasional break in the sameness and tedium which seems so much a part of instruction.

For those who would like some supplementary reading (which is *different*) or who seek a useful beginner's handbook which is relaxed and cheery, I suggest "Friends, Romans, Protestants . . ." by Father Joseph T. McGloin, S.J. (Bruce \$3.50).

He writes, as in his other works, (*I'll Die Laughing, Smile At Your Own Risk*) in a fresh, original and logical way. Although the subject is terribly serious—the purpose of Life, his humor makes the going easy as it can be. If you are looking for an analysis of a Catholic's convictions with an entertaining and readable approach, this may be it.

The spirit of the book is typified by the dedication: "To the many wonderful people—Catholics, Protestants, Jews, or just friends—whom it has been and is my incredible privilege to know." No hard ruthless line in *this* book—but an open invitation to 'separated brothers' to understand, in this day of greater communication between faiths, the 'WHY' of a Catholic's belief even when they themselves may continue to believe somewhat differently.

The pivot of the book (and most wisely, we think) is the clinically observable fact that we humans are never really satisfied on earth. Everything we want or will want, will have at least one thing wrong with it—it will be limited, finite; it will end.

The human being apparently can be truly satisfied only with that which is everlasting; or 'God.' Father McGloin nicely scores

with: "Now, it shouldn't take a genius to figure out that if our only purpose is to get back to God there has to be some means of doing so." Hence, in twelve chapters (158 pages) he gives the Way to Get to God.

His first chapter 'I KNOW a Few Things' is superb. In his demonstration of the reasonableness of God's existence, he makes several usable points which the experienced instructor can evaluate instantly. v.g. In replying to those who allege atheism because of the evil rampant in the world, Father McGloin quotes: "The terror of evil in the world springs from the heart of a coward."

The same spirit pervades the other chapters: Can God tell us Anything? Can We recognize Revelation? What Has He told us? Are Christ's claims true? Christ's Heritage and How to get it; How does the Catholic Church get that way?

Since the modern finds himself beset on every side by pressures of the material and the dimensional, he finds it difficult to discover this God Who alone can satisfy. Father McGloin, probably to the dismay of the naturalists, insists all the way through his book that even with tremendous learning, study and work on our part it is God finally Who gives us the grace to make the act of Faith. Listen to his delightful question: 'It comes down, doesn't it, to working as if everything depended on yourself and praying as if everything depended on God?'

Friends, Romans, Protestants . . . is a relaxed and helpful supplement for those who are engaged in the quest of how to reach the modern mind. We think you'll like it.

JAMES B. LLOYD, C.S.P.

READING I'VE LIKED

One of the most sensitive areas in contemporary Catholic life is the relationship between scholarly scriptural studies and apologetics, both practical and scientific. Many priests, religious and laymen, here more than elsewhere, are ill-at-ease to say the least. Two years ago, Father Avery Dulles, S.J., gave a most illuminating course of lectures on Apologetics with particular reference to the Gospels, the Resurrection and the Divinity of Christ in the light of the scriptural evidence. The series was enthusiastically received by the priests who were fortunate enough to be able to hear them. And in *Apologetics and the Biblical Christ* (Newman, \$1.50) The Woodstock Papers makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the relationship between the old apologetics and the new scriptural insights.

Priests who endeavor to preach liturgically, catechists who realize that they do more than give "religious instruction," and all who meditate on the inseparable relationship between God's Word and Sacraments will be delighted and richly helped by *Gospel Initiations for Every Sunday of the Year*. (Paulist Press, \$1.50).

"There is only one liturgy with two dimensions," says the writer; "The Mass is a holy meal at which God's Word comes to us first clothed in language and then clothed in flesh; God's Word is broken and fed to us in words before being broken and fed to us in Bread. The *Initiation's* emphasis makes the unity of Word and Bread apparent."

The fruitful theological labors of Father E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., have had immense influence on our understanding of the sacraments and related Christian doctrines. English-speaking Catholics, however, had to be satisfied with various "samplings" of his thought. This is no longer the case and with *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (Sheed and Ward, \$4.50) we are able to read one of his most distinguished contributions to our grasp of the sacrament-mystery which is at the heart of the Christian religion.

It is hardly likely that our readers have

not made the acquaintance of The Doctrinal Pamphlet Series published by the Paulist Press. Some thirty-five themes of biblical theology written by many of our most notable scholars have been completed. This series is already in its third printing. Latest titles added to the list include: The Historical Setting of the Old Testament by Robert H. Punke; Theology of the Word by George H. Tavard, A.A.; The Parables of the Gospels by Raymond E. Brown, S.S.; Judaism and Christianity by Victor J. Donovan, C.P.; The Bible and Liturgy by Ignatius Hunt, O.S.B.; The Meaning of Sanctifying Grace by Robert W. Gleason, S.J.; God's Word and Man's Response by Bernard Haring, C.S.S.R.; and Word and Sacrament in the Church by Gregory Baum, O.S.A.

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Guide Lights

PAPAL PILGRIM . . .

Pope Paul's closing discourse to the second session of the Vatican Council took note of what had been achieved. He seemed to be conscious that this was less than many had expected and he implied a hope that a third session in the Fall of 1964 could conclude the business of the council in proposals "suitably condensed and abbreviated."

In the closing ceremonies the Holy Father also promulgated the constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and the decree on the Mass Media of Communication. These had previously been given a large vote, but they were ratified by the Council Fathers a final time before the promulgation. The vote on the liturgy was 2,147 to 4, and on communications it was 1,966 to 164.

These promulgations, particularly that of the liturgy, would have captured the headlines had it not been for an unexpected conclusion not contained in advance copies of the papal address. At the end of his talk the Pope announced that he would go as a pilgrim to the Holy Land to pray for the success of the council. As far as anyone knows, he will be the first pontiff to see the holy places since the days of Peter. Later announcements have indicated that it will be a three day journey terminating on January 6.

This gesture has favorably excited the Christian world. The Patriarch Athenagoras immediately suggested that it could be an occasion for a religious summit meeting in Jerusalem of all the heads of the major Christian bodies. Such a meeting seems unlikely. Not only would it take some time to prepare for it properly, but already some of the Orthodox have shown themselves unsympathetic to the proposal of Athenagoras. There may, however, be some informal contacts.

SCANNING THE SCHEMATA . . .

Looking back on the second session, as the Holy Father did, we find a lot of unfinished business which makes it difficult to see how one more session would be sufficient. The large number of schemata originally scheduled for discussion was reduced by whittling and melding to a more

manageable figure of seventeen when the Fathers assembled in September. In the course of the session the number became sixteen since a majority voted to include the schema on the Virgin Mary in that of the Church.

When the session closed no action had yet been taken on the initial drafts of ten of these sixteen schemata. Namely: The Eastern Churches; The Missions; The Clergy; States of Perfection; The Lay Apostolate; Pastoral Ministry; Marriage; Training and Formation of the Clergy; Catholic Schools and Universities; The Efficacious Presence of the Church in the Modern World. Matter pertaining to some of these schemata was brought up under other headings. Much was said about the Lay Apostolate during discussion of the schema on the Church. There was, however, no formal consideration of any of these.

Of the six schemata that were debated two were completed and promulgated. Of the remaining four, Divine Revelation ran into trouble in the first session and was sent back for revision. It was not reentered during the second session. The schemata on the Church and that on Bishops and the Administration of Dioceses, which are closely linked together by the great debate over collegiality, are also back in committee. Finally, Ecumenism received scant attention before the session was suspended.

GLIDING GLACIALLY . . .

This record has moved one secular paper to compare the council to a glacier which advances with ponderous slowness. It has convinced a reporter for a national magazine that it has even stopped advancing. It has caused a correspondent for a Catholic paper to speak of shattered hopes. The suspicion has been aroused that forces in the council opposed to radical change have somehow gained an ascendancy, even though it is conceded that they represent a minority. It has even been rumored that they have captured Pope Paul.

One can understand how this feeling might take hold, even though it is unjustified. There is an impatience in the most patient of men when they are wedded to

an ideal. They wish to see the grand design shimmering in real dimensions with the suddenness of a single creative act. Such are many of the enthusiasts for aggiornamento. They have a vision of the Church, or certain facets of it, which they desire to see quickly articulated and set before the world with conciliar authority.

Those in this category are frequently oblivious of practical difficulties. They are irked by an honest difference of opinion. They regard every delay as a retreat. They interpret whatever is not a clear-cut victory as an ominous sign. They then become purveyors of public pessimism without seeming to realize that their negative attitude can be harmful to the very things they wish to see accomplished.

There have been, indeed, some disappointing delays in certain areas. Yet, these are not weather vanes pointing to stagnation. There is, for example, the failure of the council to act on a declaration condemning anti-semitism and on another setting forth the Church's position on religious freedom. In neither case is there any indication that these issues are dead. Pope John once spoke disparagingly of "prophets of doom" and those who were rushing for change smiled approvingly. For they were not of this number. It would now seem that some of them have moved over.

CARDINAL BEA . . .

The condemnation of anti-semitism and the proclamation of religious freedom are the last two chapters of five included in the schema on Ecumenism. Cardinal Bea expressed regret in the council that there had not been time for at least a foretaste of discussion, but he displayed no alarm. He said that one could ask if at least a vote might not be taken to admit these chapters as a basis for discussion and he declared that one might perhaps answer in the affirmative.

"Nevertheless," he continued, "I think we should be grateful to the venerable Fathers, the moderators, because they wish to give ample opportunity for speaking on the three fundamental chapters in order to prevent creating the danger that someone might say that a hasty vote was taken on these three chapters and on the two others which treat matters which are sufficiently difficult, present something new, and are of the greatest importance for the life and activity of the Church in our time."

The Cardinal also said he thought it was fitting "to meditate and ponder everything carefully over and over again, without haste

and with a serene and tranquil spirit, so that in the next session of the council they (the two chapters) may be treated and judged with mature consideration. The ancient saying applies here: 'What is put off is not put away.'

TWO THEOLOGIANS . . .

The quiet optimism of Cardinal Bea is echoed by two outstanding theologians long identified as "progressives." Father Hans Kung in an interview shortly before the close of the council expressed the same feeling of satisfaction and hope that is found in his book, *The Council In Action*, written at the close of the first session. He said that the Pope's positive attitude, the appointment of the four moderators, and the hard work of the various commissions have permitted a determined majority of the bishops to register definite progress.

His compatriot, Father Karl Rahner, said the council has achieved a degree of progress that no one could have anticipated even a few years ago. "What has been achieved thus far in the council, will not be lost," he said. "The new mentality which so clearly prevails in the Church, as a consequence of the aggiornamento by the late Pope John and confirmed by Pope Paul without reservations, finds its expression in a courage to exert an independence of judgment which indeed is gratifying."

Father Rahner concluded, "Let us not expect more of this Council than it can reasonably accomplish. Some water will always be poured into the best wine! The essential thing is that we are now on the right road. I am confident that we will make further progress."

A PROTESTANT PROFESSOR . . .

Professor Albert Outler of Southern Methodist University spoke to some fifty American bishops at a reception in Rome sponsored by the Paulist Fathers. Professor Outler said, "The great miracle of the ecumenical reality as it manifests itself at the council is the mutual recognition of somehow sharing in the acknowledgement of our God-given unity in Christ." He stated that this council marks the end of the Counter-Reformation period and "opens a new chapter of renewal and reform of the Church in which old bars of prejudice and enmity between the Christian churches are breaking down and mutual genuine interest is coming to life in an atmosphere refreshing for its freedom and candor."

JOHN J. KEATING, C.S.P.

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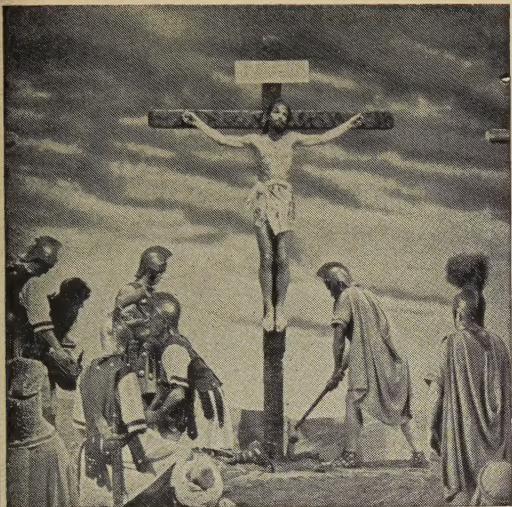
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